

Report to the Governor and General Assembly on the Warehouse Safety Standards Task Force, for the meeting held September 25, 2024

Pursuant to Public Act 102-1115, the General Assembly established the Warehouse Safety Standards Task Force to study warehouse safety standards. The Task Force is charged with providing quarterly updates of its findings, discussions, and decisions to the Governor and General Assembly, leading to a final report of recommendations by January 1, 2025.

The Task Force held its sixth meeting on September 25, 2024, at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Illinois. After procedural items such as the approval of minutes from the prior meeting, and introduction of guests, IDOL Director Jane Flanagan led the Task Force in a discussion to establish a process and timeline of developing the final report. She proposed that the report contain information on the background of the task force including the tornado in Edwardsville on December 10, 2021; acknowledgement of the victims of that tornado and their families; a summary of expert testimony; an executive summary of the recommendations that the Task Force chooses to include; and the recommendations themselves.

After a brief review of the dates and topics of prior Task Force meetings, Director Flanagan walked through summaries of each guest expert's testimony and recommendations. Expert testimonies have previously been summarized in [prior quarterly reports](#).

Alexandra Cope, whose brother Clayton Cope died in the Edwardsville tornado in 2021, raised the issue of certification or licensure for building code inspectors. Rep. Katie Stuart raised the issue of whether local governments can adopt versions of building codes that are less stringent than the International Code Council standards. IDOL staff clarified that local governments may not weaken "structural" standards such as the ability to withstand wind loads, but may exempt themselves from non-structural standards such as soundproofing.

Director Flanagan then reviewed a summary of recommendations that were provided by guest experts over the course of the task force's previous meetings, including:

Structural Safety

A. Ensure that building codes require appropriate shelters or that warehouses are built to withstand tornados.

- Encourage or require designated places for shelter or designated "storm shelters," in large footprint structures. Note that to be a designated "storm shelter" an area must meet the ICC Building Code 500.
- Design some or all ICC Risk Category II buildings (such as warehouses) to be built to meet the higher standards applied to Risk Category III buildings (such as schools and group homes) or Risk Category IV buildings (such as emergency responder stations.) Alternatively, Risk Category II buildings, or warehouses in particular, which have tall heavy walls that rely on a roof for stability instead of a traditional steel frame, should be built to withstand a minimum tornado speed or intensity.

B. Prioritize more regular building inspections by qualified inspectors.

- Local governments should collaborate on regional pools of code inspectors that could serve multiple communities; or if a local government has an insufficient budget for code inspection, that government should require the builder to pay for the inspection.
- Alternatively, the state could fund a grant program to help smaller jurisdictions meet the need for code enforcement personnel or supplements inspection and enforcement of building code standards.
- Building owners should notify authorities if there is change in commodities or population inside the building, with a resulting re-inspection.
- The State could establish professional licensure for building code inspectors, as exists for other professions such as [architects](#), [professional engineers](#), [design firms](#), etc. Alternatively, local jurisdictions should require that code inspectors become certified by a professional body [such as the International Code Council](#).

Disaster & Emergency Plans and Procedures

- A. Develop clear protocols for emergency action planning and training in large, multi-employer warehouse settings and provide authority and hierarchy for employees in the event of an emergency.
- B. Ensure that warehouse employers have emergency action plans, as required by OSHA regulations. These should include designated areas of refuge/storm shelters/safe rooms, and a way to get the workers to those safe places in a timely fashion. This includes hazard communication capabilities (such as bullhorns or loudspeakers that are audible even in the presence of noisy machinery) in the event of severe weather.
- C. Conduct regular safety drills and training, in a language or languages spoken by the employees.
- D. Employers in warehouses should have regular safety talks with occupants and be required to discuss tornado response plans with occupants.
- E. Clarify where safety responsibilities lie in multi-employer workplaces to ensure that workers receive clear information about procedures in advance of any emergency, and consistent messages in an emergency.

Emergency Response

- A. Help equip local fire departments and emergency response agencies to be more prepared to coordinate personnel and equipment necessary to respond to a disaster like a tornado throughout a geographic region by investing in the Illinois Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS).
- B. Local emergency response agencies (such as police or fire departments) should review those emergency response plans in large facilities such as warehouses, be familiar with them and the physical layout of these large footprint areas so that they are able to target response and search and rescue efforts in the event of a natural disaster.

C. Consider statewide support for local police and fire in this respect.

Additionally, IDOL staff provided an overview of the Mutual Aid Alarm Box System.

Director Flanagan then presented a suggested timeline for future meetings and development of the final report. Members discussed the timeline and agreed to tentative dates as follows:

- On or before Oct. 16, 2024 – Members provide feedback on draft recommendations or new recommendations and Members of the public submit any additional recommendations
- On or before October 30th – IDOL circulates the draft report and recommendations
- Week of Nov. 12th – Task Force discusses and votes on final report
- Late November – IDOL circulates final version for minor edits
- Early December – IDOL Submits final report

The Task Force then turned to the public comment portion of the meeting. Alex Cope distributed a letter from her family advocating for strengthening OSHA standards regarding tornado preparedness; and for the General Assembly to pass a resolution urging Federal OSHA to do so. She also advocated for the State to provide funding for municipalities to conduct building standard inspection and enforcement.

After the public comment period, the Task Force adjourned.